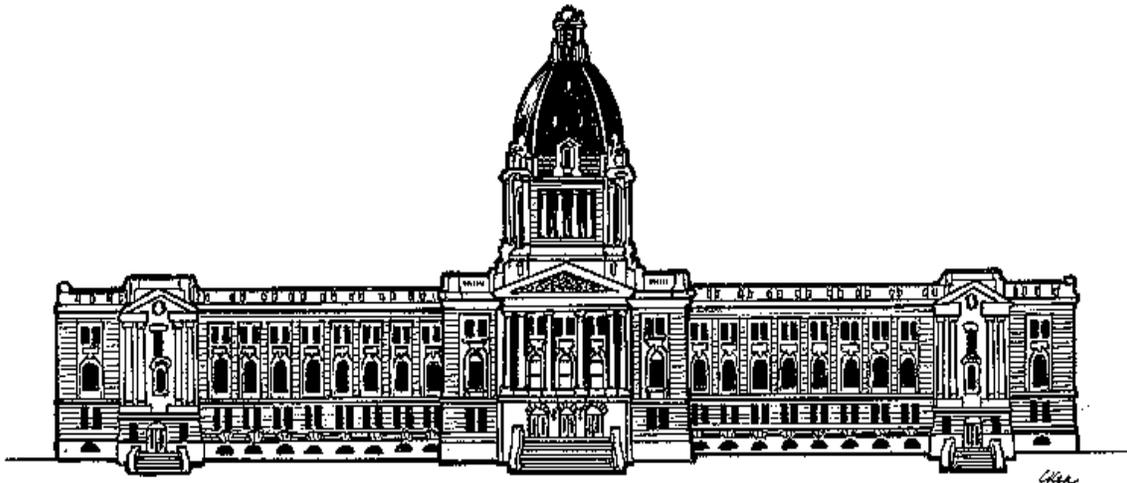




STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 8 – November 25, 2004



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-fifth Legislature

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS AND INFRASTRUCTURE
2004**

Mr. Ron Harper, Chair
Regina Northeast

Mr. Bob Bjornerud, Deputy Chair
Melville-Saltcoats

Mr. Denis Allchurch
Rosthern-Shellbrook

Ms. June Draude
Kelvington-Wadena

Ms. Sandra Morin
Regina Walsh Acres

Mr. Kim Trew
Regina Coronation Park

Hon. Mark Wartman
Regina Qu'Appelle Valley

The committee met at 15:00.

The Chair: — Okay, well I would like to call to order the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Infrastructure. Thank you. The order of business before the committee will be the consideration of supplementary estimates for the Department of Highways and Transportation. I recognize the minister and ask the minister to introduce his officials.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates
Highways and Transportation Capital
Vote 17**

Subvote (HC03)

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would be pleased to introduce my officials. First of all, seated immediately to my left is George Stamatinos, assistant deputy minister. To my right is Terry Schmidt — my immediate right — Terry Schmidt, assistant deputy minister. And to my far right is Cathy Lynn Borbely, director of corporate support.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to draw to the committee's attention that we do have a couple of chits for today. We have Mr. Hermanson sitting in for Ms. Draude, and Mr. Andy Iwanchuk sitting in for Mr. Wartman. I recognize the minister for his opening statement.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thanks very much. This is very brief; it's just to outline why we're here today. The committee is being asked to consider supplementary estimates for the Department of Highways and Transportation because of the additional funding that the department accessed under the airport capital assistance program, or ACAP as we refer to it most often. This program is administered by Transport Canada. It provides funding for capital improvements to airports that receive regularly scheduled service.

This year the department received 1.208 million from ACAP to improve drainage at the Stony Rapids airport. This is, we think, an important project because this airport, one of 18 operated by the department, provides the only year-round transportation link to Stony Rapids. Approval for this project was received from Transport Canada subsequent to the tabling of the provincial budget in March.

As such, the estimates for the department need to be amended to reflect this additional expenditure. That being said, this work does not change the province's overall financial picture as the cost of this project is funded 100 per cent through ACAP. And with that we'd certainly be pleased to answer any questions.

The Chair: — Thank you. I recognize Mr. Bjornerud.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister and your officials here today. And we also understand that what we're talking today was actually strictly in a line here. I would hope the minister would give us a little latitude on asking some of our highway concerns that have come up in the summer or late summer. So if you would be willing to do that and if Mr.

Chair would be willing to allow that, we would be very happy to go that way.

Mr. Minister, a highway that I've talked to you and your officials about last spring and has really come to light — I've got many, many complaints on — is No. 8 Highway north of MacNutt that was resurfaced just before the election. And I know this was . . . We've talked before about this, so the timing was somewhat questionable about how political this was.

But having said that, the road was surfaced. The thin membrane surface is totally disintegrating, and I don't know if it's been brought to your attention, Mr. Minister. And I've just saw it first-hand in the last month or so that I've been out looking at this highway. There's spots in that highway that if you do not drive down the centre of the highway . . . And I maybe should explain this highway. It was a . . . well maybe what we would have called a super grid at one time. It was gravel and wide-based, heavily built for heavy traffic. And now has, you know, got the sand on it and the thin membrane surface on it.

But what's happening now is, is both the outside shoulders near the outside lines on it are totally just disintegrating. It is a terrible mess. And I drove it a number of times this fall because I got a number of calls on it. And if you don't drive in a lot . . . for miles at a time or kilometres at a time, if you don't drive down, strictly down the centre, you're either in these holes or you're in these holes. And I guess my concern is that it's going to totally disintegrate completely.

Now just before freeze-up the guys were out there — the highway fellas were out there — and they were trying to do their best to patch it up to get it through the winter I would presume.

I guess my question is, is there anything going to be done for next summer for this road? Like, I think, you know, the taxpayers and the people that live along there wonder what's going to happen to this road. They appreciate the hard surfacing. They've got away from the dust. They've got away from the gravel. Although I've had a lot of complaints because it's a thin membrane where, you know, we've transferred the weight over to some of the RM roads; that's been a, kind of a bone of contention. But the biggest issue that's been brought to my attention is, what are we going to do with this road now that it's falling apart?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I'll just make a couple of statements about it. First of all let me just say — this is, this is somewhat sarcastic, I guess — but with reference to it being . . . any roadwork being done that is political, all governments I think over the years get accused of this. Any roadwork that's done a year before an election, the accusation is that it's political. So I think the only way you would resolve that is to ensure that there would be no roadwork done a year prior to whenever you think the election's going to be. So I don't think any of us are in favour of that.

With respect to the highway that you describe, it actually has been brought to my attention several times. So I am aware of it. I'm going to ask the assistant deputy to speak to the specifics. So if . . . I think Terry is going to answer the question.

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Minister. As you may be aware and you alluded to, that this section of highway was part of a transportation management plan for the area whereby we did enter into partnerships with the local rural municipalities there in designating heavy-haul routes. And as part of that, we could then designate this route for light vehicles only, which did allow us to put on the dust-free surface on the road.

As you also know, this year was a bit of a difficult year for construction. It was a very wet season, especially on that part of the province. We did encounter some problems during construction with the wet subgrade, but we wanted to proceed with getting the project completed. And with the additional moisture that we received in the spring and some of the early snowfalls, the subgrade did get wet.

And as you mentioned, our crews did go out in late fall getting the surface into a safe, acceptable condition for the winter, freeze it in. And then the schedule is that next year we'll go out in the spring. We'll reassess. We'll look at the subgrade condition. We'll dry it out. And we are confident that once we've got the subgrade dried out, we'll be able to get the road into a safe travelling condition again for the whole roadway width.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you for your answer. And to the minister, maybe just one little short remark to talk about what we talked about, being political. I would make the minister this pledge, that if in the case of an election year and you wanted to get away from the politics of it, come and do all the work in the Melville-Saltcoats constituency, and I'll make you this promise that I will never say it's political again. You can avoid the other 57 constituencies, and I won't have a problem with that. My colleagues probably aren't going to go for that, but I know the people in my constituency would appreciate it.

Anyway, getting back to No. 8 Highway, and I thank the minister for his . . . the deputy minister for his answer. I guess I'm questioning these thin membrane surfaces because if that one would only last . . . and I know it was wet, and I know the reasons that part of it is falling apart and crumbling. But I also would question out there the thin membrane surface. Like it looks to me like — and I'm guessing — that there might be at the most a 2-inch surface being put on these roads.

And I'm . . . don't get me wrong; I'm certainly not an expert in paving or hard surfacing. But I don't think that there was any way that this road was going to stand up — whether it was dry, wet, or whatever — with the thickness that was put on that road with the amount of traffic there. And I would hope next, and as you said, we're going to reassess it next spring, and I think that's all you can do at this point.

I mean fair is fair, and the highway fellows are out there doing their best to make this safe and get away from these little . . . well, you know the little pieces of pavement that fly up in the windshields and everything else. And then the fact that I thought the most dangerous part of it was that everybody you met was going down the middle, so all of a sudden we're pulling off and then the pavement flies, you know.

And there was stretches there that weren't bad. There would be the odd hole. But there were stretches there that it was very,

very unsafe. So I want to bring that to your attention, and we'll probably talk again in the spring. And you know I'd be interested in the follow-up next summer. I know there's nothing you can do this year.

I won't take too much more of your time — my other colleagues have questions — but I'd like to . . . a question come up two or three times this weekend about grass cutting along 16 Highway, and I've kind of wondered this one myself from time to time. How do we decide what's going to be cut? Like, say on 16 Highway, which is one of our main highways in the province, how do we decide if it's going to be cut right to — say — the edge of the right-of-way on the highway on both sides? Then we'll go a ways, and all of a sudden you'll come to an area where there might only be one width of grass cutting on there, two widths of grass cutting at the most.

And I guess the complaint I'm getting is that there's a lot of areas where the willows are growing up, and they might be four, five, six years and they're getting a fair size. And I think we all know the cost increases to knock them back when that happens.

But the question I'm getting is who decides and how is it decided on whether to cut right-of-way, fully, or not?

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you. The way that is done is . . . Our policy that we follow is that every year we mow a 4-metre stretch adjacent to the edge of the pavement, and every three years we attempt to do a full right-of-way cut. And what we do . . . we supplement that though. And at areas where there's problems with sightlines or where we do have some brush control problems where the roadway narrows up, we will try to address those in a timely manner on an annual basis.

So those decisions are left to our area managers to manage the mowing program, and they do have some flexibility there in addressing some of those safety issues. And so we try to address those as much as we can through surveillance of the road systems on a regular basis and consultation with our stakeholders, with local governments, with area transportation planning committees, as well as local road users.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you for the answer. Did I hear you right? Did you say every four years trying to do right-of-ways and then do the other . . .

Mr. Schmidt: — Every three years we attempt to do the full right-of-way cut.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you for that. And they may be doing this, and I'm not sure, but I know in our area that we have a lot of spots along 16 Highway that are very wet, and I know they can't get in there in the summertime. It's just about an impossibility these last few years.

Maybe they do this, but has it ever been considered to go out after freeze-up, like when the water in these ditches is froze up, and cut off these willow spots? Especially I'm thinking between the railroad track, CP (Canadian Pacific) goes through, and they've been a real snow catcher, and I know it's a problem for the highways as well as us as the traffic and the people out there.

Mr. Schmidt: — Yes, that has been a practice of ours in the past, is that in late fall, before there's too much snow on the ground and it becomes difficult to get into those areas. But yet when they're frozen up enough, we will go in with the mowers or the hydro axes and try to clear some of those areas as well.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would let one of my colleagues have the floor now.

The Chair: — Ms. Harpauer.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have actually not a lot of questions, but they're fairly specific, so you may have to refer to getting answers back to me.

I want to return to a highway that I had brought up in estimates in the spring, which is Highway No. 47 in the area of Wolseley, and in particular the concerns were coming from the RM (rural municipality) of Wolseley. And I had forwarded a letter, and I received one in response from your department. And in the letter dated August 30, the department officials were saying that they would agree to meet with the RM of Wolseley:

Based on the discussion with . . . local governments, department officials are compiling maps and additional details with the intention of conducting an open house meeting, likely in September. The location of . . . (that) meeting has yet to be determined.

I had just spoken with the RM of Wolseley not that long ago, and they still have not heard anything from your department. So my question is whether or not . . . or where that's at, when you'll be able to meet with the RM of Wolseley?

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you. The department has initiated a location review and assessment on the corridor between Highway 41 . . . or 48 and Highway 1. And I'm pleased to report the department will be seeking feedback from the public and stakeholders at an open house which is scheduled for December 16, 2004, in Grenfell.

So we have been able to tie down a date now that harvest is complete and some of the other busy fall activities are complete. We are looking at December 16.

So with this information, we'll be able to make a recommendation for the location of Highway 47 that can be put forward for department approval.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you very much for that answer. The other questions I have have to do with the north roads, which maybe is more appropriate since this is also dealing with an airport in that area. But if I'm understanding correctly, on a lot of the north roads the government has a partnership agreement with the mining companies. And the trucking company involved is NRT (Northern Resources Trucking Limited Partnership).

And in the partnership agreements, the mines pay for a certain . . . or pay a certain amount of money, the percentage of the savings they make from being allowed to have heavier weights on these roads. And that money goes towards construction changes and, you know, construction of those roads.

Who is responsible for the maintenance of the roads?

Mr. Schmidt: — If it's a provincial highway, which most of the routes are in the North there, we are responsible for the maintenance, the department is.

Ms. Harpauer: — I've had some complaints from people that are travelling those roads, not on the construction of them, and I don't believe that their demands are even all that particularly unreasonable. I've travelled the road to Wollaston Lake and passed three government or department camps on that road. My understanding is that road is probably the only road that they have to maintain. And talking to the locals on the way as well as the trucking company, there was concerns of the day-to-day maintenance. They understand that this is not going to be a superhighway, and that is a North road and you have to keep that in mind.

What kind of accountability do these work camps have, that they are indeed maintaining this road adequately for the trucking traffic?

Mr. Schmidt: — I apologize for the delay, I just had to confirm some things there with George. On the northern roads, we have standards that we set forward for the gravel roads in the North, as well as . . . just like any other road where we have standards with the conditions.

We provide maintenance to the northern roads in several different ways. One is through our own department crews. One is, as well, we have some contract work. And depending which highway we're speaking to, the contract work could be with the Athabasca Economic Development and Training Corporation or it could be with individual First Nations up there. Either way though, they have to apply and maintain the road to the same standards as we would as per policy.

Now if there are specific roads that you would like us to look into and provide those standards to you, we can do that.

Ms. Harpauer: — I'm not so sure that the standards are inadequate. How do you know that the crews are doing the work? What do the truckers do if they find that it hasn't been graded for an extended period of time? And the damage that happens to their rigs is quite substantial, of course, when these roads deteriorate.

As I said before, I don't believe that they're asking for a super, super road here. But they are saying that many days will go by where the grader has never made a pass; it's sitting in the camp. I've been told that the equipment is very good equipment that has been put up there to maintain these roads. They would like to see that equipment on the road. So if they have complaints, what avenue do they take? How do they get the graders on the road, get the daily maintenance done?

Mr. Schmidt: — Well as far as accountability goes, I mentioned we do have the standards and part of the process as well is the regular surveillance where our area managers and section managers do travel the roads to ensure that the work is being done as planned. If there are certain concerns with the level of service being provided, stakeholders or road users are welcome to contact our local area offices, depending which

section or area the road is in, and we would be pleased to look into that in more detail and see if we can address those concerns.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you for that. I just have one other question, and this one is quite detailed. At Johnson River camp, which is on that particular highway, Highway No. 905, there's a single gal that runs the camp by the name of Jean Graham. About five kilometres north of Jean's camp is a telephone, and it's the only phone for miles.

My understanding with CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) rules, that we cannot have phones that are pay phones — it's a pay phone — we cannot have pay phones that are not making money. So it was suggested to me that perhaps this phone would be subsidized for safety purposes because it is in a very remote area. Does the Department of Highways subsidize having pay phones on their remote roads?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I'll just put it on the record. I said that's a good question for the Minister Responsible for SaskTel and for Highways and Transportation. To the best of our knowledge we do not subsidize these telephones for safety reasons.

Ms. Harpauer: — Could you just find out for sure and get back to me? This is not urgent by any means, but this particular phone I had some concerns with the location of it and if your, you know if your department is helping to pay for it because it is very remote, then I would like to know where to address the concerns.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Absolutely.

Ms. Harpauer: — All right. Thank you for that.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Allchurch.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, welcome to your delegates today. I just wondered if you have a dress code in your ministry because I see the three gentlemen are all wearing the same coat, coloured coat. It looks good. I think you should hit him up for a suit too.

Mr. Minister, in regards to the extension of the airport runway up at Stony Rapids, I would have to say that I'm in agreement with it. I have a buddy up at Stony Rapids and he welcomes the fact of a larger runway for the planes to land.

In regards to that, I have some questions with the money allotted for the Stony Rapids area in regards to not only the airport runway but also the highway going north. And I had a e-mail came from a member from Athabasca Economic Development and Training Corporation, and he is wondering why the provincial government will not fund the all-weather roads north of Athabasca.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — First of all, let me just say with respect to dress code as the Minister of Highways, I'm the one that paves the way for these sorts of things.

I think what you're actually asking is why — and correct me if I'm wrong here — but I think you're asking, why doesn't the

provincial government pay for an all-season road? Is that what you're actually saying? Or is the question, do we pay for the maintenance of the seasonal road?

Mr. Allchurch: — Well I believe in the Athabasca-La Ronge area north, the roads are cost shared by the federal government and the provincial government, is that not correct?

Mr. Schmidt: — The roads are maintained by the provincial government in the North.

Mr. Allchurch: — They're only maintained in the North? Who's responsible for building the roads in the North? And I'm talking about Athabasca area.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We should just be clear so we answer the question properly. Are you asking specifically about the all-seasonal road that goes . . . or the seasonal road, I should say, that goes up to Stony Rapids or are you asking about roads generally in the North?

Mr. Allchurch: — No, I'm asking about the roads north of Athabasca — north of La Ronge in the Athabasca area, the all-weather roads. I presume they go up to the mines and whatever have you.

The Chair: — I recognize Mr. Allchurch.

Mr. Allchurch: — Just a clarification to that, Mr. Minister. It's the roads that are within the Athabasca Economic Development and Training Corporation. Does that help you?

Mr. Stamatinos: — I think now that we've got it clear which roads you are referring to, member, the road I think you are referring to, it's the road to Wollaston, and there's another one to Stony Rapids and into Fond-du-Lac. Those roads are in discussion with the federal government. We've had numerous discussions with them with regard to a cost sharing arrangement. Right now there is some discussion on a one-third, one-third, one-third basis. And we're still discussing some closure of that relationship. Our position is we would need more than a one-third contribution by the federal government.

There are discussions at the federal-provincial level through the Transportation Association of Canada with the Council of Deputy Ministers to see if there is some potential for a program for remote and northern roads. And we're progressing on that front with discussions.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I'll just supplement that answer a little bit as well in realizing what the question is specific to now.

Let me explain the rationale for our position for believing that there should be a significant contribution by the federal government as well. A large percentage of the people who live in the region that you describe are First Nations, and whether, I mean, the issue of whether or not responsibilities should change is maybe a discussion that should maybe happen sometime. But generally speaking, because the majority are First Nations there, they have been the responsibility, those individuals have been the responsibility of the federal government.

For a road to be constructed into those communities, first of all,

it's very expensive. But secondly, it will reduce the costs of goods and services, appropriately so, into those communities significantly, thereby benefiting the federal government to a very, very large degree. That's the premise of the argument by the province. We're saying if it significantly benefits the federal government for products and services that they are ordinarily now delivering, then therefore there should be some cost sharing by the federal government.

And I think by virtue of the fact that they've paid for a portion of the seasonal road from Points North into Stony, there is an acknowledgment by the federal government that in fact they do share responsibility. The issue is just the amount per year and what the percentage will be.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And your answer, it was one-third, one-third, one-third. One-third is federal government and one-third is provincial government. Who is the other third?

Mr. Stamatinos: — It would be a partnership. Sorry, Minister.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — On the road that you're talking about, it would have been partnerships with the communities; the road we're talking about, I should say, which is the all-seasonal Athabasca road. But it could be with the mining companies as well in the region.

Mr. Allchurch: — So the other one-third then could be different organizations or different infrastructures that's costing that?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Yes, that's . . . There isn't a program that requires one-third, one-third. It's just on the roads that we're familiar with right now, it just has been one-third, one-third, and one-third. There's not sort of a cookie-cutter model for this though.

Mr. Allchurch: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. In regards to roads south of that area — the all-weather roads or what they call them, four-season roads in some aspect — and I'm specifically talking about the road going up to the Doré Lake, it is actually a road being put in to help a forestry company like Weyerhaeuser. How was the funding for that type of a road set up and how much does the provincial government play a role in funding that road?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Can we get a written response back to you on that specific? We don't have that information here with us today.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, yes, you can get a written response back to me in that regard.

In regards to roads similar to that though, is it a cost-share between a forestry company like Weyerhaeuser and government or is the government funding the road completely?

Mr. Stamatinos: — If I might answer that. It depends whether it's done under the transportation partnership program or whether it's done under the roads and transportation agreement that we hold with Weyerhaeuser. And that's what we'll have to check into for you and we can get back to you on that.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you. I will accept those answers later on. The last line of questioning I have is in regards to Highway No. 3 which is between Prince Albert and Glaslyn. There's a portion of road there, and I've asked these questions before, that is not stipulated primary weights.

They brought the highway up in many cases, taking out the wood culverts, brought them up to steel culverts to accommodate primary weights. As it is right today, it is still not classified as a primary weight road. In the future, the very near future, will they be bringing that up to the primary weights?

Mr. Stamatinos: — What we can answer is, on that particular stretch of Highway No. 3, the department is currently engaged in a review of our primary weight policy. And we have held extensive consultation with many stakeholders on . . . to solicit their views on primary weights province-wide and what their regional needs are.

We're in the process of reviewing the results from that consultation process, and we're also in the process of doing some analysis. And we hope to get back to those stakeholder groups sometime in the spring of 2005. And Highway No. 3, that section of Highway No. 3, will be considered in that review.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you to the answer to the question. Just a follow-up to that, our local stockyards e-mailed me and asked me to present this question if it was possible: that a transport company that trucks cattle out of that area has been asking the stockyards to pay overweight permits, but they are the only one doing it; no one else has been asked to do that. Has the department been aware of this, and is it allowable for a trucking firm to insist that the stockyard company be enforced to pay overweight permits on that section of road?

Mr. Stamatinos: — If I understand the question correctly, there's an issue with regard to accessing primary weights on an agreement basis. The department has a program that's targeted toward the movement of agricultural goods under the transportation partnership program. And I . . . without more information on this particular situation, the way that program would work is the shipper — in this case would be the livestock owner or producer — would come to the department to enter into an agreement with us that would allow them to haul livestock at primary weights on a secondary weight route. There's some conditions attached to that of course, but I believe that's what you're referring to.

Mr. Allchurch: — Yes it is. The trucking company is Roberge Trucking, and they are the ones that's insisting that the . . . (inaudible) . . . stockyards pay overweight permits on that section of road simply because the primary weights have not been rectified on that road. But they are the only trucking company that are. No one else that trucks cattle out of there have been requesting overweight permits. Why is one trucking company doing it and not others?

Mr. Stamatinos: — If I might answer that for the member. What would be helpful for us is if we could get some more information on this situation. It's difficult without knowing more detail. And perhaps we can get back to you in writing?

Mr. Allchurch: — Okay. Is it possible that this trucking firm has a partnership with the provincial government and that is why they are asking for overweight permits?

Mr. Stamatinos: — Well we could certainly check that out. That's why we need some more information who the trucking firm is. We have over 100 agreements. So we could certainly go back and check our files and we can get back to you.

Mr. Allchurch: — If that is the case, why is Roberge Trucking the only one that can? Why can't the other ones?

Mr. Stamatinos: — If they are operating under a partnership agreement, they can certainly haul at primary weights.

Mr. Allchurch: — Okay thank you, Mr. Minister, and . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Hermanson.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the minister and your officials. I actually do have a couple of questions on the airport capital assistance program.

But before I get there, I was intrigued about some of the questions about highways in the North. And it brought to mind that a few years ago I was asked for support for a proposed highway that would extend beyond . . . an all-season highway that would extend beyond Points North all the way up to Fort Smith that would be cost-shared by the province and the federal government; perhaps even industry. And I haven't heard much about it in the last year or so.

Is there any progress being made on that? Is there still talks? And my understanding was that the federal government was at least providing passing interest. You know, would there be a potential. It would certainly cut a lot of miles off for anything being trucked out of the Yellowknife area into parts east of Saskatchewan and it would certainly bring extra truck traffic and commercial activity to our province.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Actually, it's an intriguing notion actually and I've actually heard that raised a few times but practically the only formal discussions that are taking place are with respect to the all-seasonal road from Points North to Stony Rapids.

Mr. Hermanson: — Please help me understand the airport capital assistance program. What is the total amount of money in this fund and is it entirely provincial dollars?

Mr. Schmidt: — I'm not sure of the annual amount that is provided through this fund by the federal government. It is 100 per cent federal dollars. There is no provincial contribution to this to match the dollars or any percentage of that. It was 100 per cent federal dollars.

Mr. Hermanson: — So then the \$1.208 million for drainage at Stony Rapids, those are provincial dollars that you are having to provide because of the airport capital assistance program in the Stony River . . . why is this part of the estimates? Because obviously they are provincial dollars that we are talking about.

Mr. Schmidt: — The \$1.208 million is federal dollars that

flows through the provincial Department of Highways budget.

Mr. Hermanson: — So you've received an additional \$1.208 million from the federal government and because it's . . . the bookkeeping is done by the province you have to come before the legislature and make this a supplementary estimate. Is that how this works?

Mr. Schmidt: — That is correct.

Mr. Hermanson: — So you don't know what the total amount of funds that Saskatchewan received through this program is and how it compares to other provinces in Canada?

Mr. Schmidt: — I don't know how it varies between other provinces in Canada. However, I can tell you the \$1.208 million is the total value for this fiscal year. Now in previous years we received a total of \$8.7 million since the program was initiated in 1995. And an additional \$4.7 million of that was provided for the La Ronge airport which is operated by the town of La Ronge. But for the provincial airports, the four provincial airports in Wollaston Lake, Stony Rapids, Fond-du-Lac, and Uranium City that are operated by the department, the province has received \$8.7 million since the program was initiated.

Mr. Hermanson: — So then does the province approach the federal government to say we have a need in this area, will you designate funds from this program for this project? Or does the federal government approach the province and say we want to invest dollars in this airport, were going to put it through . . . we want to put it through your books?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I'm just going to answer this because I'm going to supplement with some other work that's going on with respect to the same line of questioning. The province is the one that usually approaches the federal government to try to get funding, and we're always of course saying we don't get enough for these sorts of things. But having said that, at the last ministers of transportation meeting in Quebec City, this program applies to . . . the funding only applies to regularly scheduled service airports.

We've been lobbying, all ministers across Canada . . . It would be particularly beneficial to Saskatchewan, I think, to also have the funding qualify for airports that would receive regularly chartered service. Because many of the airports in the North obviously don't have regularly scheduled air flight service in there, but regularly chartered, even if it's . . . We would even like to have the airports that would qualify that wouldn't even have necessarily regular flights. But right now we're going for regularly chartered flights that would be most helpful for us, too. So really what we're looking for is more flexibility in the program right now.

Mr. Hermanson: — So when you negotiate this type of financial assistance for the province of Saskatchewan, is this fund negotiated, are federal dollars into this fund for our province negotiated at the same time you might be appealing for federal dollars for national highways and upgrade of our road system?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I think the answer is generally yes. I know in this last round with the additional funding we received

for ACAP, we also received, virtually at the same time I believe, the designation of a number of new roads under the national highway transportation system. So the answer to your question is yes.

Mr. Hermanson: — So give me an idea, Mr. Minister, what the total amount of federal assistance would be in the province of Saskatchewan, including the monies under the ACAP program and all other programs. What number of federal dollars from the current fiscal year are we receiving for transportation from our friends in Ottawa?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — We don't have that here. Let me just say I think . . . I'm not wanting to avoid answering questions because we thought we'd be answering specific questions with respect to ACAP, and we don't mind trying to answer questions. We'll get the answer for you.

I can say that so far I believe the cumulative total that we received in the last . . . 160 million in the last . . . since 1997, there has been, we think there should be substantially more as do, I think, almost . . . as does almost every other jurisdiction. But in fairness to the federal government, there has been a significant increase in the last few years in cost sharing from the federal government and that's witnessed by the accelerated twinning, particularly here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I think my questions are quite relevant to these estimates because I'm trying to determine just what portion ACAP is of the total amount. And also, as Intergovernmental Affairs critic, I wanted to know that Saskatchewan is getting its fair share of transportation funding from the federal government — you know, obviously, the more we have the better off we are. So if you could provide those numbers for me I would certainly appreciate it. Perhaps you could even go back then for two or three fiscal years and show me whether the trend is up or down and whether there, you know . . . not only for the whole amount but for each individual fund, what's happening there so we have some idea. Thank you.

Just two other questions — and now I confess not related to the airport capital assistance program, but you've been very gracious in delving into other areas and we appreciate that. The issue of primary weights has come up; also lately the issue of potatoes has been, you know, quite prominent again in Saskatchewan. After the hindrance to the industry from our provincial NDP (New Democratic Party) government, the next biggest hindrance is the fact that there aren't, you know, aren't primary weights out of the Lucky Lake area.

Potatoes, if the industry's going to go forward in that area, potatoes have to be transported out on other highways — 42 and 342 East . . . West, Highway 42 to the southeast, or Highway 45 north to Highway 15. I mean, that route's the only way out of there. And actually I think the majority of potatoes tend to go west. But they've got to get out somehow. And my understanding is for the industry to become economically viable, primary weights have to be hauled.

Is your department looking at providing primary weight access into the Lucky Lake area so that potatoes can be transported out of that region at primary weights, and so they can compete with

Outlook and Lumsden and other areas where potatoes are grown?

Mr. Stamatinos: — If I might answer that, Mr. Hermanson, there's two things that are going on in terms of the primary weight issue specifically to the haul of potatoes. As I mentioned earlier, we have made some adjustments to the transportation partnership program that favours the movement of specific agriculture commodities, one of them being potatoes. And we've implemented that policy I believe just this past spring just to facilitate the efficient movement of those goods.

We've also made some accommodation specifically for potatoes again, to allow them to haul at higher than secondary weights — which is the regular weight regime for most commodities in this province on secondary weights roads — to allow them to haul at higher weights during the spring ban period, recognize they have to get their products to market. So that's one accommodation we made specifically for that industry.

Mr. Hermanson: — Okay, well thank you for that answer. I guess then the subsequent question is: will the condition of the highways as they are now handle the increased loads? Are you planning on strengthening the base and the surface of those highways so they can handle heavier loads? And that of course would not only be a benefit to potato producers but to all heavy-haul loads out of the area.

Mr. Stamatinos: — Again there's two aspects of this. First of all there is what we call hauling primary weights under what we call . . . like the transportation partnership program. And then there's the second aspect, is reviewing the weight designation system across the province which is the network of primary weights.

And as I mentioned earlier, we are in the process of doing that review, and the road network around the Lucky Lake area will be considered as part of that review.

Mr. Hermanson: — So this is a province-wide review then.

Mr. Chair, last question, and I won't get tired of asking this until I get a good answer that tells me something's going to be done about it. I have urged the department both through the Public Accounts Committee and through this committee, every opportunity I have, to look at providing passing lanes on Highway 4 in the South Saskatchewan River Valley at the Saskatchewan Landing Park. I feel it's not only a frustration to motorists, increasing numbers of motorists. I think it's dangerous the way it is right now. And I know there have been accidents in the past in this area, and I fear lives will be lost.

Can you tell me whether there's been any progress in speeding up the scheduling — because I understand this wasn't on the schedule at all — speeding up the scheduling of putting in passing lanes, particularly on the south side of the valley. But it's required on both sides of the valley, given the increase in tourism with the expansion of the south Saskatchewan provincial park and given the increase in trucking in that area.

Mr. Schmidt: — The department continues to look at this as a project in the future. And it has been looked at and studied and

assessed for meeting the criteria and awards. And what we will be doing is when Highway 4 becomes scheduled for resurfacing again, the project will be considered — the Highway 4 project — and will then be assessed through our asset management program for rehabilitation, and the issue of the climbing lane will be reviewed at that time again.

Mr. Hermanson: — The same answer I got last time. Nothing's changed.

The Chair: — Mr. Elhard.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon, Mr. Minister, and your officials.

Since the topic of this particular session centred around airports in the North, I'd like to also draw your attention to airport operations in the South. This has been a particularly important issue to communities in the Southwest. I know we've had three airports that have needed renovations and repairs over the last couple of years, and funding has been a real problem for them.

But just recently the town of Shaunavon celebrated the renewal of their airport facility. The province played a role in that. Can you tell me what source of funding was provided to that airport project and if that source of funding is available to other airports?

Mr. Schmidt: — I don't know the specifics of the Shaunavon project, but the department is involved with southern airports. The airport assistance program, which does provide grants for maintenance of the facilities, and the dollar values do range depending on the class of the airport.

So there's certain criteria — such as the surface type of the runway, the length of the runway, the type of navigational aids and things like that — that all determine the amount of grants. And I believe the grants vary from \$700 to a maximum of I believe it's \$3,500, but I'd have to verify those numbers for sure.

So I'm not specific on the numbers that were provided to Shaunavon, but that is the context of the program that the department is involved with.

Mr. Elhard: — Is this program recent, a fairly new feature as part of the Highways budget? Because there was a time when funding for highways . . . I'm sorry, from the Highways department for airport projects was virtually eliminated.

Mr. Schmidt: — The program that assists in the maintenance has been ongoing for some time. I believe quite a few years ago there was also maybe some available for some capital improvements and it has now been changed to the maintenance program to allow for ongoing maintenance of the airport — runway, facilities, aprons, that type of thing. But it has been in place for . . . I could get the exact date for you if you would like that, but it has been in place for some years.

Mr. Elhard: — Well even if Shaunavon got the maximum of \$3,500 it probably wouldn't merit the official opening ceremony they had. And so there must be funding from some other program within the government that they were able to tap

into.

I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to draw the minister's attention to Highway 32 again. We talked at length about Highway 32 in the June estimates. And as he may have noticed when I stood up yesterday and today during petitions, I have petitions with literally several thousand names from residents that live along that highway, that use that highway as their primary access route, either to Swift Current or up toward the Leader area. And you know, the urgency of that particular highway, the repairs needed for that particular highway, is growing.

I was in the community of Sceptre and Leader just about 10 days ago now and drove down that particular road, and there's an accident waiting to happen there. It's not only very uneven. It's one of the TMS (thin membrane surface) roads. It's been, you know, pushed out and impacted, obviously by heavy truck traffic in the area. But the local maintenance crew based in Leader can't keep up with the problems there. And I don't even know if they're given the resources, let alone having the time and manpower. Materials and so forth would be in short supply to maintain that section of road.

So at the last conversation I had asked where that particular highway rated in the long-term capital plan for the area. I don't think it made this five-year plan. And I don't know if it was even in next year's five-year . . . or the upcoming five-year plan. But can the minister or his officials give us any clear indication of what they are able to do in the short term to provide for the safety of the people who travel that region? And then too, what kind of hope can you give them in terms of capital improvements to that road?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Let me say first of all, Mr. Elhard, for your constituents, you've never been remiss in raising this issue, just so you and your constituents are aware of that. But secondly, I also am well aware of the fact that the petitions were raised today, and we are made aware of this section of road on numerous occasions as well.

With respect to what the plans are, I'll have Terry Schmidt, the assistant deputy, talk to you a bit about what some of the things that are being planned right now.

Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Minister. As you mentioned, with the ongoing increasing truck traffic in the area on Highway 32, with the oil and gas industry expansion as well as agriculture, the road is seeing distress, and we are concerned with that. And in response to that we have been working to our best abilities. We did strengthen a 3-kilometre section that had been internally treated back to gravel, so we were able to restore that to a dust-free section this year. That was completed in mid-September.

As far as the long-term plans in developing our capital plans for next year and beyond, especially for upgrading of thin membrane surface highways, as you can appreciate right now we are targeting the capital funds to take advantage of the federal cost-sharing Prairie Grain Roads Program. So that's where we are focussing our efforts right now, is completing those corridors that are approved under the Prairie Grain Roads Program.

And the department officials though have been meeting with local municipalities and local governments and want to continue doing that to review partnership opportunities that maybe we could access to help accelerate or move this project forward to a more acceptable level of service.

So in support of this initiative and potential partnerships, the department will be positioning an approximately 37,000 tonnes of aggregate to be crushed, stockpiled, and hauled to the road site this winter. In fact the tender did just close earlier this week.

So we are hoping to be able to engage in some partnerships that will allow us to look at improving the level of service on this road in the short term.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Schmidt. The partnerships you're referring to, are they with municipal governments that are along that stretch of road, or are we talking more or less intergovernmental partnerships? Are we also talking about partnerships with companies that run on that road? Or both?

Mr. Schmidt: — We have entered into various different types of partnership. We treat each one as unique. We look at seizing opportunities that all partners can bring to the table in all areas of the province.

We have entered into partnerships that just involve the local municipalities right adjacent to the roadway. We have also entered into partnerships with as many as six rural municipalities that draw on the highway as an economic development support route. And we've also been able to engage private industry into some of those as well, and in some cases we've also had local governments engage other partners to come to the table as well.

So we never want to try to make a cookie-cutter solution for every one because each is unique, and we want to allow that flexibility and innovation and creativity to come to the table.

Mr. Elhard: — In terms of the definition for a road that would qualify for the Prairie Grain Roads Program, does Highway 32 not qualify as a grain haul?

Mr. Schmidt: — Highway 32 did not qualify as a Prairie Grain Roads candidate on this round of the program.

Mr. Elhard: — Could you identify what the limitations were or what the problems were in terms of qualification for that road?

Mr. Schmidt: — I can't speak to the specifics of this one, although there were certain criteria such as incremental haul on the road due to changes in grain transportation and agriculture. There was other things that did come into play too, as supporting other economic development initiatives in the area, traffic volumes, route consistency. But I don't have all the specifics on Highway 32.

Mr. Elhard: — Would it be possible to suggest that the much increased traffic related to oil and gas development there might have been a hindrance to its approval, as opposed to a help in getting approval for this? Does that come into play there? Is it seen that the impact on that road might be more a result of oil

and gas traffic than grain-related traffic?

Mr. Schmidt: — I'm not sure it would be a hindrance. The criteria for the Prairie Grain Roads Program though was, a key element was increased damage due to grain transportation changes. So roads, of course, that had a higher impact due to grain transportation changes would rank higher than other roads that had impacts due to other type of activities.

Mr. Elhard: — I have just a couple of moments left according to the clock, so there's just a couple of other issues I'd like to raise quickly. There's ferries that are operated by the Department of Highways and Transportation in the communities of Estuary, Lemsford, Lancer. And the people in those communities are very worried about the viability, the long-term viability of those ferries and the threat that they appear to be under. Can the minister or his officials give us some assurance today that those ferries will continue to operate?

Mr. Schmidt: — As you may be aware, the department recently made some fairly significant investments in the ferries within the province to bring them up to the new federal regulations for the various Acts that govern the ferries. So we would hope that we would be able to operate those ferries, to recognize those investments that have taken place over the last year or two.

Mr. Elhard: — I'm going to read into that the answer is yes, that they will continue to operate in the near term for sure as a certainty.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Let me just . . . I think, I mean, there's never anything absolutely guaranteed, but for sure there are no plans to be shutting any of these ferries down.

Mr. Elhard: — The last question I'd like to direct to the minister at this point is the terms of the loan that the Department of Highways and Transportation extended to the new owners of Great Western Railway. They just recently took ownership of that railway. The loan, I believe, is valued at \$1.7 million. May we have the explicit terms of reference for that loan and any other attachments to the loan, any conditions that might be outstanding?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Let me answer the question this way, by saying we here in the department don't have . . . wouldn't have a problem giving you explicit details, the specifics of it, but it is a contract between two parties. We'll undertake to see whether or not there's any issues around the release of that, providing the other party doesn't have a problem. If they don't, we'll provide the details for you.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think my colleague has one additional question.

The Chair: — The last question goes to Mr. Bjornerud.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, somebody must actually watch this. I can't believe that, but they do. And a call came in and it was 16 Highway, Yorkton to the Manitoba border. And the concern they had was the ruts in the highway and I know what they're talking about now. When you're

driving a little car and the ruts from the semis — you know, continually, continually — and little cars weave when they hit these ruts. They indent in each lane from wear and tear.

Is 16 Highway, anything slated for this next summer for resurfacing? Do we know at this point or am I being premature that that's not been decided yet?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — There's nothing on the winter tender schedule, but that doesn't mean that there wouldn't be something for the spring tender schedule. And any circumstances like that, particularly on route 16 where's it's a fairly high volume of traffic, that would be something that we would monitor fairly closely. I think there is a significant investment like other roads and we wouldn't want that investment to be lost. So we'll be watching that fairly closely.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and we want to thank the minister and his officials this afternoon for answering our questions and giving us a bit of a wider scope than we maybe would have expected. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Bjornerud. Seeing no more questions on supplementary estimates subvote 17, Highways and Transportation Capital, airport capital (HC03) in the amount of \$1,208,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Okay. I'll need a member of the committee to move:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2005 the following sums, which to the extent they remain unexpended for the fiscal year are also granted to the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, for the Department of Highways and Transportation Capital, \$1,208,000.

Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Subvote (HC03) agreed to.

Vote 17 agreed to.

The Chair: — I thank the minister and his officials. And if the minister has any comments, we would entertain them now.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you. Of course, just I want to also thank the officials who obviously provide . . . are able to provide much more detail than I am able to do, so it's a great format that we actually have here. Also, thank the members for their very good questions and their understanding in their allowing us to get back to them with specifics. So thanks very much.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and your officials. Now we'll take a brief break while we wait for the minister and his officials from the Department of Northern Affairs for the consideration of those supplement estimates.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates
Northern Affairs
Vote 75**

Subvotes (NA01) and (NA04)

The Chair: — The committee now will reconvene to take into consideration the supplementary estimates for the Department of Northern Affairs, and that'll be subvote 75. I recognize the minister and ask the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. With me this evening, or this afternoon, to my immediate right is Larry Steeves, deputy minister, and to my immediate left is Richard Turkheim, the executive director of resources and industry development.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, if you have opening comments we will entertain them now.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. Together with my officials, I would like to . . . I'm pleased and honoured to respond to any questions that the members may have pertaining to the proposal to provide a supplementary budget of \$363,000 for Saskatchewan Northern Affairs in 2004-05. I'd also like to make some opening remarks about the purpose for these funds.

First, we are about to make a major step forward in working with industry and the federal government to clean up abandoned mine sites in the North. These sites date back to the time in the 1950s and also in the early '60s when the federal government held sole responsibility for the development of the uranium industry. Unfortunately this predates both the intervention of the province in regulating uranium mining, and the strengthening of federal regulations.

In the 1970s Saskatchewan became a world leader in initiating environmental, occupational health and safety, and socio-economic impact policies associated with mining developments. This was largely through the efforts of the Bayda Commission and the Mitchell inquiry into proposed expansion of uranium mining centred on Key Lake and Cluff Lake mine sites. As a result, no development projects have been approved since then without clear responsibilities and funding provisions being put in place for decommissioning and reclamation-approved mine sites.

However by 1998 the government identified that the existing Gunnar and Lorado sites were environmentally liabilities. More recently as a Centenary Fund project, we documented other smaller mine sites that had not yet been properly decommissioned.

During recent years we have repeatedly engaged the federal government to discuss how it might jointly address this troubling legacy. We believe our efforts contributed to the federal government's commitment earlier this year to earmark funds for the cleanup of contaminated sites across Canada. We are optimistic the northern Saskatchewan sites, particular Gunnar and Lorado, will be given high priority when specific federal funding commitments are announced.

For that reason, the province has allocated \$12 million, which we are quite confident will be matched by the federal government over and above any responsibilities still held by private industry. This is a matter of course that was dealt yesterday by the committee, however if there's any further questions for Northern Affairs, we're more than prepared to answer.

In the meantime and in preparation for the larger cleanup projects, the province has taken necessary action on its own. Through Northern Affairs, Industry and Resources, Saskatchewan Environment, and the Saskatchewan Research Council, we are completing preliminary engineering assessments at the Gunnar site, putting safety measures in place at other sites, and ensuring that northerners are fully involved in current and in future work.

Increased activity in the cleanup of former mine sites accounts for \$130,000 of Northern Affairs supplementary estimates. This includes: \$22,000 associated with federal negotiations; \$79,000 for secondment of an environmental cleanup specialist, who is also assisting the province in dealing with the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission; \$17,000 to meet the associated administrative requirements with Northern Affairs; and finally, \$22,000 to permit the full participation of the Athabasca members of our Environmental Quality Committee in discussing options and priorities for decommissioning plans for the Gunnar site.

The second priority being addressed by the supplementary estimates is further expansion and diversification of our northern and provincial economy. During the past few years we've been working with northern communities to revitalize Saskatchewan's commercial fishing industry. We are not currently using all of our sustainable quotas for commercial fish harvests. This is particularly true in the Athabasca region because of the long shipping distance from the Far North to the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation's processing plant near Winnipeg.

As a result Saskatchewan's Cooperative Fisheries Limited, on behalf of their member fishing co-ops, has developed a business plan to establish a new fish processing plant in Prince Albert. The plant would create about 30 full-time jobs. It will also create seasonal employment and increase fish harvests and lakeside packing operations across the North.

The SCFL (Saskatchewan Cooperative Fisheries Limited) proposal is supported by FFMC (Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation), which would directly participate in the marketing of the new plant's output. SCFL has developed a financing package involving equity investments by the fishermen themselves, and investment from venture capital funds, as well as loans and capital leases.

The province is making provision for a \$350,000 contribution to the project. This is conditional upon approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and then on confirmation that SCFL's total financing package is in place. Half of this amount has been designated with an existing budget for the Department of Industry and Resources. However the second \$175,000 is to be provided by Northern Affairs when the financing package is in place, require the supplementary estimate that is before you

today.

The final component of our supplementary estimates relate to the role of Northern Affairs as a general contact point for northern residents when dealing with provincial government issues. Northern people value having a minister and a department that can play a coordinating and advocacy role for northern issues. For this purpose 38,000 will permit the minister's office to be staffed as per Executive Council regulations for such offices. The minister's office was also pleased to provide a student employment and training opportunity during the past summer.

These are the initiatives that require a supplementary estimate of 363,000 for the Department of Northern Affairs. Thank you, and I would be pleased to respond to any of your questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And we're open for questions. Mr. Allchurch.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials here today. I want to say a special welcome to Mr. Larry Steeves who I believe used to work for Mr. Taylor's office, and his loss is now your gain, Mr. Belanger.

In regards to the supplement under Northern Affairs, you've given an outline of the breakdown of the \$363,000. I was wondering in the breakdown is there any work going to be done in regards to the cleanup, or is this all going . . . all the money going to be going to administration to set up the cleanup?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — I think as indicated yesterday through Minister Cline's office that the process really is probably an eight-year process, whereas the first several years we're going to be doing a lot of research and doing a lot of assessment on the sites to try and figure out what exactly is required on the sites.

And of course much of the concentration of the abandoned mines cleanup will be spent on places like Gunnar and Lorado. We've done some of the work already in terms of safetying the sites and advising people not to go the sites themselves because these sites are fairly dangerous in a sense that there's open shafts and there's old buildings that are around some of these sites. We don't believe there's any public health risks, but nonetheless we want to keep people to . . . we want to ensure people keep away from these sites. So some of the work that we have done is actually safetying the sites.

The first couple of years upon successful discussion with the federal government, we'll be really doing up a plan of action as to how we get these sites cleaned up to a point where they're acceptable to not only our provincial environmental regulations but also to the CNSC's (Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission) regulations, the federal government and so on and so forth. And that will take at least several years to put in place.

And following that of course, the bulk of the work in terms of cleanup would be undertaken over the last six years. So we're looking at a two-year time frame to assess the sites and to do all the necessary work to know what exactly needs to be done; six years to do the actual cleanup. So it's an eight-year time frame,

and I'm fairly confident that we can meet that time frame.

And to add a bit more information I'm going to also get Mr. Turkheim as he did yesterday, to provide additional information that I may have missed.

Mr. Turkheim: — Thank you, Minister. The funds are principally to ensure that Northern Affairs, in its coordinating role on behalf of all the departments involved in this file, have the necessary technical expertise to deal not only with the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and the many questions and reports, etc., that we have to deal with and prepare for them, but as well to also ensure that we have administrative support particularly with regard to the interdepartmental work now of 10 departments provincially that have to be involved from their different mandate perspectives in the appropriate corporate response on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan vis-à-vis these abandoned mines.

There has been, I believe, other funds dealt with under the Committee on the Economy yesterday in Industry and Resources — a commitment of 12 million that represents dollars that this government has committed, provided there's matching funding by the federal government brought into place. That will be the dollars which actually will be used to address cleanup work on site.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, and your official for the answer. I know over the number of years there's been a lot of study done in regards to the cleanup of the mines up there. And from what I gather from your comments, that it'll be a few more years of study to find out how and the best way to clean it up. Can you give us an approximate date of when cleanup may start to commence?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — As we've indicated from time to time, the important thing that we want to ensure that following the heavy investment that the provincial government is going to be undertaking — and we hope the federal government as well and a private sector company — as a result of some of the heavy investment that we are going to undertake in this particular project . . . But at the end of the day the end result is that these sites are safetyed and that these sites are cleaned up for many, many years to come . . . and that we also monitor the sites for a short time frame just to ensure that these sites are cleaned up and the money was well spent. So that will certainly take us some time to determine the plan of action to achieve that end result.

So as I mentioned earlier, the first several years is to make sure we know exactly what we have to do, and the last six years of the eight-year time frame is really going to ensure that the bulk of the work that needs to be done — safety and to clean up these sites — is done, and following that of course the monitoring phase.

So clearly I think in terms of the schedule, we can get the specific dates as to how we want to roll this out. And of course all this is pending federal government approval, if they decide to come on board, which we are confident that they will. And we continue to await word from them — patiently I might add. And that following that particular approval, then we're able to move as quickly as we can to get the plan in place and to

implement the plan.

So, Richard, I don't know if you want to add anything else.

Mr. Turkheim: — If I were to provide an estimate based on recent discussions with CNSC officials, including two days ago of this week, my estimate would be that the earliest we could proceed with actual activity on site, beginning decommissioning work, based on a Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission licence, would be likely the summer of 2006.

And just to elaborate, I say that because of the necessary process steps that the federal CNSC regulatory officials must take in reviewing the decommissioning plan that the proponent would be responsible for preparing and all the coordination that those CNSC officials have to do with department of Fisheries and Oceans, Environment Canada, the CEAA (Canadian Environmental Assessment Act) Act and its many stipulations, etc. In fact the CNSC officials are reluctant to commit to one year being the time frame within which they could review and perhaps approve a plan once we frame it.

And as a final comment — I'll try and be brief — there's also, before the plan is prepared, the whole matter of the federal regulatory officials working with their provincial colleagues in Environment agreeing to what the closeout criteria have to be around which the plan must be developed. And unfortunately it's a slow process.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Yes, I would also add to that, Mr. Chair, if I can very quickly, that our self-interest in this particular project is to ensure that these sites are cleaned up. And after heavy investment by not only the Saskatchewan taxpayers, but the private sector player that's involved and the federal government, that once these sites are decommissioned, they're cleaned up, then they obviously become property of the provincial government because the federal government will then license these sites to our government, to our province.

So it's incumbent upon us to make sure that once they're licensed to our ownership, so to speak, that we undertake when the opportunity presents itself, as it does here, that we do the job right from day one, so we don't have another \$10 million problem five or six years down the road.

So institutional control, policy development, making sure we follow CNSC guidelines, department of Fisheries and Oceans, and all the CNSC guidelines, it's frustrating to go two years. But we have to do it to make sure we do the job right. And the reason why we have to do it right . . . because eventually we'll own this property. So we want to make sure it's cleaned up for the good of the environment, for the economy, and for our own financial purposes down the road to make sure it's done right.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for the answer. In your comment you made reference that there was money of 12 million set aside. Is this the total amount of money you figure it's going to cost to clean up the project? Or is this \$12 million the total package between the cost share of the federal government and the provincial government together? Or is this 12 million just of the Saskatchewan government alone?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — I'm going to ask my official to explain

the entire package, but I can tell you the 12 million is provincial contribution on our own. It's our \$12 million contribution which we hope the federal government will match.

But in terms of the rough estimates, in terms of the costs and breakdown, again I'll defer to Mr. Turkheim. He can give you the more specific information.

Mr. Turkheim: — Thank you, Minister. The \$12 million that the minister referenced is indeed the province's commitment towards this much sought cleanup project — a commitment that the province has said we're prepared to make subject to the federal government providing matching funding of 12 million. The total estimate therefore that we have been working from now over the past year and a half is actually 23 to \$24 million to clean up the Gunnar site plus an as-yet-undetermined number of the other 41 smaller satellite sites that are in that Uranium City area.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you for the answer. This \$12 million, is that money that you're setting aside now, or will be set aside in the future because there's nothing mentioned in the budget.

Mr. Turkheim: — That money is being set aside this fiscal year. It will be set aside and is being set aside, being recommended to this House as a line item within Saskatchewan Industry and Resources budget. The money I understand will be set aside and committed as contingent liability funding, meaning the residual budget-free balance unused in any year would carry forward into subsequent years in order to be able to be there with the matching federal dollars to address this eight-year project of planning for and then delivering over six years, the cleanup project.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you. In regards to that then, you're hoping that this next year the federal government will commit their share of the \$12 million so that you can put into your budget next year the \$12 million set aside for this project.

Mr. Turkheim: — We're very hopeful that the federal government will commit its funding and sooner than within the next year.

The recent signals received informally from the federal government, from different departments of the federal government over the past two months, indicate that federal officials are looking at the \$500 million contaminated sites program funding that the federal government announced in its throne and budget speeches earlier this year. And they are preparing a framework or, if you will, an action plan as to priority projects that would be funded for cleanup from this program.

We're advised by federal officials that the likes of the Gunnar and the Lorado sites, two of the largest of the abandoned mine sites, that they are, to paraphrase or quote actually, "at the top of the list." I would hope . . . and this was a subject of discussion in yesterday's estimates as well with Minister Cline and his department. From my own perspective, an estimate, I would hope that we would be in a situation to have a memorandum of understanding concluded with federal authorities by end of fiscal year, this one and then within a matter of hopefully not too many weeks or a couple of months

thereafter to be able to actually conclude the necessary federal-provincial agreement.

And the reason for optimism in being able to conclude that agreement fairly quickly is the fact that from June 1998 until February 12, 2000, federal and provincial officials worked through seven drafts of a \$25 million cleanup agreement that just happened to fail to conclude at that point and time. So there's a good body of work to start from.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — I would also add to that effort . . . obviously we're confident and we're patient, but to also point out to the Assembly that part of our positioning — if you wanted to use a phrase of positioning Saskatchewan's interest — is we have done a bunch of work in the past talking about safetying the sites . . . (inaudible) . . . working closely with CNSC, and some of the work that Richard spoke about earlier.

And we've also positioned this particular project well from Saskatchewan's point of view because, at the end of the day, we sit down, we have been very patient and very professional with the federal government, we commend them on their effort of cleaning up some of the contaminated sites across Canada. And we hope that Saskatchewan is part of their thinking on how to disburse those funds. And we have positioned Saskatchewan well of being proactive in terms of putting the \$12 million on the table now. We have not taken any irresponsible political positions. We have been very neutral in that sense. We have done our homework. We know we have more work to do. So absolutely Richard is right. There has been a history of good co-operation there. We have positioned Saskatchewan well, and as of this date we are waiting for word from the federal government — patiently I might add — to try and see these projects through.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, for the answer. I know \$12 million sounds like a lot but in regards to the cleanup of especially the two huge sites, Gunnar and Lorado, it's definitely not going to fulfill the needs that is required to complete that process. But \$12 million set aside is definitely going to be in the right path.

I would like to go down the road further on that but I want to break and go into a comment you made, Mr. Minister, regarding the fish plant in Prince Albert. You've set aside some money in this supplementary budget for that. How many dollars have you set aside?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. Obviously we have set \$175,000 as indicated in my opening comments towards the fish plant concept or the fish plant project. Obviously Saskatchewan Industry and Resources have also contributed a matching fund. But for purposes of the supplementary estimates, Saskatchewan Northern Affairs is contributing 175 to be matched by Industry and Resources for a total of 350.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In regards to the fish plant in Prince Albert, I know Prince Albert is probably happy that this is coming there. I've had some concerns from northern people that the plant should have been built in the North, especially around La Ronge or that area there, but nevertheless it's going ahead in P.A. (Prince Albert).

One of my concerns is I've had many phone calls from Besnard Lake area in regards to the commercial fishing on that lake and therefore how it reacts to the plant that's going to be built now. It will no doubt increase the pressure on Besnard Lake and other lakes as far as commercial fishing. What is the department doing in regards to that with this plant because it's a larger plant?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well first of all I would say that part of the premise of this government recognizing some of the challenges of commercial fishing is that, you know, the whole notion of developing the commercial fishing industry itself should really lie with the commercial fishing industry. The point is that we respect and recognize their role and we certainly respect and recognize the decision-making process that they have when it comes to their particular industry.

And while I most certainly agree that from the political perspective it would be much more popular for me as Minister of Northern Affairs to have the processing plant located somewhere in northern Saskatchewan and . . . But the discipline we have to have around the table as a minister is that — while I personally would be in favour of a northern location, and politically it may help me having it in a northern community — I must respect the decision of the co-operative fishermen's association with the decision that they made.

It was disappointing at the least but, at the outset, I think we have to be respectful of their industry. So when they made this decision and they made their choice as to the location of the plant, I just simply defer their decision of their industry to them. And our role here is to support that process.

And in reference to the question about the fish stock, I would defer that question to the Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Environment. But I would say since Northern Affairs went on this joint effort with Saskatchewan Environment to revitalize the commercial fishing industry, what our intent there was is to turn this \$4 million-a-year industry and to double it to \$8 million.

And instinctively, people — such as the Besnard Lake folks and some of the other fishermen — would say, well are you going to double your harvest? And the response I have for them is, when we say we're going to double your industry from 4 million to 8 million, it doesn't mean doubling the harvest on the current lakes. What that is, is there's a combination of (a) opening up new lakes. There's a combination of making sure that we value add to the actual product. So as opposed to us shipping this commercially caught fish all the way to Winnipeg, which in some cases is a 12 or 14 or 18-hour journey, that we can actually do processing in Saskatchewan which in turn puts more money into the commercial fishermen's pocket.

So really it's a combination of opening up new lakes, lessening waste of fish, value adding to the actual fish itself. And all these measures, undertaken by both Northern Affairs and by Saskatchewan Environment, is intended to put more money or more dollars into the commercial fishermen's pocket.

That is not meant to diminish the importance of tourism. It's not meant to compromise the quality and quantity of the fish populations throughout the North. We understand that balance

has got to be achieved. And so far the commercial fishermen over the years have made many sacrifices on many lakes to ensure that the fish population does indeed stay healthy. And I could add that while there may be challenges in certain lakes, there's some lakes like, as an example, Buffalo Narrows, where the population has rebounded dramatically over the last three or four years.

There's other communities where we've seen the commercial fishing industry catch fish at a volume that was never caught since the 1960s. And what that sends to me and signals to me is that the commercial fishermen are making extreme sacrifices to build up those stocks. They're respecting the quota system.

And that's exactly what our intention was as a government, is to have them positioned well to protect their industry all the while knowing that there's other interest in the fishing industry. But more so, that we have to guide the good management of these lakes in as many lakes as possible to ensure that we have that healthy fish population.

And to me, the partnership approach that we have with the co-operative fisheries association is really going to pay off dividends when we get that final piece of processing, because at the end of the day, peace in the valley between the sported fishing industry, the First Nations or Métis fishing or domestic needs for fishing, and the commercial fishing industry all have their role to play and the benefits to share.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you for the answer. In regards to the fish plant in P.A., with your comments I know for a fact that the benefits to the commercial fisherman would have been just as good in La Ronge as it would in P.A. And I've often looked at the fact that if a commercial plant was built in La Ronge, it's a lot cheaper and more economical to haul processed fish down that highway from La Ronge down to Prince Albert, rather than haul bulk fish down to the processing plant in PA.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well I would also point out that there is probably a lot of logic to some of the arguments that Lac La Ronge made, perhaps some of the arguments that Buffalo Narrows made. There was even arguments presented to me by folks in Fond-du-Lac, which is in the Athabasca Basin, and they say that the fish population and the annual allocation of fish may be as high as 1 million pounds, so it makes more sense to have it there.

There's also the argument of the infrastructure of some of the northern communities. Some say they have it, and other people, they don't have the necessary infrastructure.

At the end of the day there's probably 50 different arguments from 50 different communities as to where the fish plant should be. And as I mentioned in my earlier statement, I would much rather have, from the personal and political perspective in terms of benefits, having the processing plant somewhere in northern Saskatchewan.

But at the end of the day, the commercial fishermen themselves, the each individual co-op dotted across the North, they indicated from their perspective — the clear answer was, Mr. Minister, this is our industry, this is our decision, and if you

inject yourself to make a political decision on where this plant should go, then you're doing a great disservice to our industry. So we ask that you respect our industry; respect our decision. Even though it's politically not advantageous to you, to at least recognize that from the economic perspective, from the infrastructure perspective, and from our own source of decision-making perspective, that this is where we think it should go.

And at the end of the day I have a strong belief that we all know what needs to be done, but you have to leave the how to the imagination, spirit, and intent of some of the groups like the commercial fishermen's co-operative as to where they want to take their industry. And this instance, as tough as it was, it was not a popular decision to have to locate it outside the North, but from their perspective it was the right thing to do. I respect them for that and I support them for that.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Maybe this is one good example of why the North feel that they've always been left out when it comes to major decisions that are made in this province.

Here you have an industry where the lakes are in the North, and you know that better than I do. You have the commercial fishermen based around the North — and it doesn't have to be in La Ronge, it can be over in Buffalo Narrows or wherever — the whole point of this was it's an industry for the North. And yet somehow through government and politics, this plant was set up in Prince Albert. And to the northern people this is something they can't understand, why they have something in their area and yet it's funnelled out and gone south.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well again as I mentioned, we have not interfered and have said this is going to P.A. As I've indicated earlier, I can explain it 10 ways to Sunday, that at the end of the day we have, as a minister, utmost respect for the industry, the commercial fishing industry, to ensure that they're able to exist for many years alongside the sport fishing industry and those that fish for domestic purposes, whether it be First Nations or Métis.

Now if I'm going to do a service, if I'm going to do a service to the commercial fishing industry, there's a number of things you have to do. First of all you have to ensure that the quota system is protected, which we have done to a number of initiatives jointly worked on by both Saskatchewan Environment and Northern Affairs. The second thing we have to do is make sure that we tout to the rest of Saskatchewan the value of the commercial fishing industry, and the fact that there's 600 fishers throughout northern Saskatchewan that benefit from the commercial fishing sector.

And you'd be surprised at the end of the day, the commercial fishers themselves took an equity position in a Prince Albert-based fish processing plant, to the amount I believe of between 6 and \$800,000. So not only did they make a decision where the plant should go, they've told me as a minister, you back off our industry. You don't tell us what to do with our industry; we tell you what we want to do with our industry and you primarily assist us. We don't want you to babysit us or direct us.

So I want to make clear the statement you made, that it's not political interference that's making this going to P.A. It's contrary to that. It's non-political interference saying we respect what you want.

So you protect the quota. You protect the lakes. You position them as a commercial fishing industry to be on par in terms of strength, economic strength, and members' strength, to be on par and in the same level of influence as the sport fishing industry. And you respect the decision that they make for their own industry, because at the end of the day what we want to do as a government and what we want to do as a ministry and what I want to do as a minister is to ensure that the commercial fishing industry is viable, it's independent, it's in a partnership mode when it comes to sharing the resource, and above all else, that if we afford them that independence, then in essence we afford them the strength and the power to continue, regardless of politics.

So it is our endeavour as Minister of Northern Affairs to make sure that they become powerful, that they become independent, and that they become a big part of the economy of the North.

So with your insistence that it's political interference to the industry in terms of different ways you propose a question to me, I would say, well we haven't interfered. In fact the commercial fishermen, fishers, have bought a whole pile of shares in the industry and then they decide where they wanted it. So if anybody's interfering with the process, well I can't figure out from where I sit. I can simply say we respect their industry, the decision that they make in terms of where they want it. I think we all should learn a lesson and respect that. And I believe the correct amount that they've invested in terms of their shares is \$582,000, which is a significant investment.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I hear what you have to say. I know for a fact, though, that there's many people from the North that have phoned me and said . . . and questioned what you have just said in regards to where the fish plant should be.

In regards to the fish plant and the amount of fish quotas that's going to be upped regarding this, I'm wondering after last year's budget where there was a number of COs (conservation officer) in the North that were lost, amount of jobs lost, I'm wondering how that would look in the near future regarding the fish quotas being up and the lack of resource people that will be looking after that?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well I would say to that effect, is that this is obviously a question for Saskatchewan Environment, and I will defer the whole notion of the COs to the Department of Environment.

In reference to the role of the commercial fishermen co-op and the commercial fishers themselves is . . . I have a strong belief — again going back to my earlier point — that if they know that there's benefits from the industry, if they're actively investing in their industry and they've worked at this industry for many, many years, they've made great sacrifices by giving up things like summer fishing and only going to winter fishing to protect the stocks. Many of them have traditionally fished in the old days, and many young people are coming back into it.

So if you do all the values of what they have shown in terms of respect for their industry, naturally from my perspective I always encouraged them. You guys have done all this and you've also been stewards, watching and maintaining those good, solid, fish quota and protection of your industry by making sure people aren't abusing it. And so I think it's a combination of making sure we have good enforcement but really using peer pressure to, within these particular groups, to ensure people aren't abusing their industry or disrespecting their industry and abusing the resource.

Now what I've often told the commercial fishing industry, if you know of folks out there that are fishing with small mesh nets or fishing out of season under a commercial fishing title, then it's important that you not protect them, that you not hide them, because they're not doing damage necessarily to the government — they're doing damage to your industry, a discredit to your industry. And they're also affecting the quota which has an effect on you.

So this stewardship development that we've undertaken with making sure that they're out there, watching what's going on, in concert to enforcement, I think at the end of the day would spell good government to me. And I think that's some of the things that we're trying to instill in the commercial fishermen themselves.

Mr. Allchurch: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I have no further questions but my colleague, the member from Rosetown, has. So I'll turn it over to him.

The Chair: — Mr. Hermanson.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and his officials for being here.

Well back to the issue of the mine cleanups — in general terms, would the minister explain what the role of his department is in contrast to what role is being played by SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) and Industry and Resources?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well I'm going to defer to either the deputy minister or the ADM (assistant deputy minister) in terms of where our process would take us. I will say at the outset that Northern Affairs has been, and the officials of Northern Affairs, has been a very strong lead in this particular file.

We have interaction and constant coordination with other departments within government. And that includes the Department of the Environment, that includes the Department of Industry and Resources, that includes the Department of Labour. There's just a wide variety of issues that we have cross-departmental responsibilities for. So it does take a multi-departmental effort to make sure that we position Saskatchewan well.

One of the most current examples that I would use for your information is that in terms of the protocol of discussing this whole file with the federal government, obviously the department of industry and resources in Ottawa would have a relationship with the Department of Industry and Resources on a provincial basis. So this is why you see the interaction

between Industry and Resources as a department and Northern Affairs as a department on the provincial scope, is that we're all kind of working together.

And at the end of the day, what we want to make sure is that we have a good, interactive, solid model that Saskatchewan can tout as the vehicle in which we could deliver good benefits as a result of this abandoned mines cleanup. So again I'm going to defer to one of my officials to add if I may have forgotten something.

Mr. Steeves: — I think the minister has largely captured it. What we do is really two things. Firstly I think we have particular technical skills in areas such as leasing. You will know I think just on the basis of the quality of answers you received earlier that we have several officials — Mr. Turkheim who brings strong technical background to the specific issues of this industry — in effect, I think bring that kind of knowledge base that helps guide overall discussions and decision making.

We also serve, in addition to specific things like leases and so on, we also serve as a coordinating role. We chair and provide lead on a coordinating committee with a variety of departments across government to ensure that the province has a coordinated approach to addressing issues as they develop. Where it's, as the minister indicated, an environment issue, that's their responsibility to handle that. Where it's a matter of making sure that the provincial departments are working in a coordinated and relatively cohesive way, that's our job. We chair, we lead and we provide admin support to that overall group.

So it's some technical, specific issues but more broadly a coordinating and support role where that seems to be appropriate.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — I'm also prepared to share with the member a letter that we've sent dated November 15, 2004, to which it really talks about the coordinating effort at the federal level that is necessary at the provincial level because this letter's gone out to both Minister John Efford, who is the Minister of Natural Resources Canada, and also to the Hon. Stéphane Dion, who is the Minister of Environment Canada.

And this is a joint letter to two federal ministers from two provincial ministers — Minister Cline and myself. So in that instance it just shows that coordination is there on a provincial basis and that, while we're the lead, we have some very good collaboration and co-operation by a number of ministries, and that's intended to serve us quite well. So I'm prepared to sit and share with you if you'd like.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well that partly answered the question but not entirely. Perhaps I can come at it a different way. What would the total budget amount out of Northern Affairs be? What portion would be directed to the supervision of mine cleanup? And how does that compare with the budgeted amounts from SERM and from Industry and Resources for this project?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Again in reference to which department does what and allocates and disburses funds, I'm going to defer to my officials because they certainly have the role and the responsibility to manage the finances on behalf of the minister.

So I'll defer that to either official.

Mr. Turkheim: — Okay, thank you, Minister. In terms of the number of dollars being dedicated this year within Northern Affairs budget towards abandoned mines cleanup, and beyond the \$140,000 supplementary requested by these proceedings, there is a good portion, if you will, of my salary given my role and responsibility for lead on this file amongst departments, etc., but by far the lead ministry this year in terms of expenditures is Industry and Resources.

Industry and Resources department has a budget this year to support cleanup work or to support what I would call environmental site characterization and preliminary engineering assessment work, which has been completed this summer on the Gunnar site. That was a contract undertaken through Saskatchewan Research Council together with a number of other consulting expertise in the engineering and fisheries fields, etc., and that work's being completed now.

In addition, from the budget within Industry and Resources, the government also is just now concluding a tendering process, and I can't get into the specific figure, but is prepared to commit to undertaking some site safetying work at the abandoned Cinch Lake Cenex site about eight kilometres outside of Uranium City to do some shaft recapping work, etc. Those are where the major expenditures are based this year from that budget within Industry and Resources.

Mr. Hermanson: — So what amount — you must know because you're working with the other ministers — what amount of the Industry and Resources budget is dedicated to mine cleanup?

Mr. Turkheim: — If I am correct in estimating — and I think this is a subject of these current committee proceedings — that Industry and Resources budget will move to an approximate \$73 million figure. And I look to be advised by the Chair or anyone else with that kind of knowledge. The amount of money available within SIR's (Saskatchewan Industry and Resources) budget this year as a fraction or a percentage of the total budget of SIR would be . . . I don't have a calculator . . . it would be less than 1 per cent, I believe. There is about a \$780,000 total commitment this year.

Mr. Hermanson: — So the government in total — SERM, Industry and Resources, your department — is spending less than \$1 million dollars on mine cleanup in this year's budget.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — I would point out — I'll get the officials to complement the answer — I would point out that at the end of the day we're still in the situation where we're trying to engage the federal government to come forward with their commitment. The question was posed to me by the media, would you proceed with this project if the federal government wasn't interested? And the obvious answer was that it's difficult for us to proceed to a project that has a 60 per cent incompletion target because what value does that do . . . half clean up a mine site?

So I think at the end of the day we want to make sure that while we are spending money at this stage of the game, it is primarily for safetying. And as the officials said, site characterization and

safety warnings and a lot of money has been spent to engage the federal government as well. So while the figures don't look that great in terms of the cost of the project, they are great in the sense of the commitment so far that we want to use that money as wisely as we can to position Saskatchewan as best we can to get the federal government to commit. So the investment we have now is intended to attract federal support, which will lessen our overall cost dramatically to this project if the federal government comes on board. So again I'll ask maybe the deputy minister to elaborate.

Mr. Steeves: — I'm new to this file, but one of the things that struck me when I came here and started looking at this one is, this is an industry that by and large was driven by the federal government. For strategic reasons during the Cold War it took over control of it for obvious and positive reasons I think. For a variety of reasons these particular sites, the federal government for some period of time felt that they did not have a responsibility for, and I think that the provincial government has been pressing them over a period of years to reconsider their position.

It would appear that that is likely to be the case, and there might be a danger if the province were to engage too directly in this. It would allow the federal government to say, well you're taking care of it, so it's not our problem any more. And in which case what overall looks to be a \$24 million project based on estimates to date, it then flows back to the province as opposed to a joint responsibility. Keeping in mind that originally the federal government did say this is an important industry, and we're looking after it, and we'll make a decisions about what happens. So they do have a moral responsibility, and we're still investigating the legal responsibility, but certainly a moral responsibility which they appear to be increasingly recognizing.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. I wasn't looking for excuses. I was looking for a number. I don't know if I got one. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Hermanson. Not seeing any further questions, we will move forward with the vote now on the supplementary estimates for the Department of Northern Affairs, vote 75, subvote administration (NA01) in the amount of \$65,000. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Subvote (NA01) agreed to.

The Chair: — And resource and economic development (NA04) in the amount of \$298,000. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Subvote (NA04) agreed to.

The Chair: — Now I'll ask a member of the committee to move:

Resolved that there be granted to Her Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31, 2005, the following sums for Northern Affairs, \$363,000.

Is this agreed? Ms. Morin.

Vote 75 agreed to.

The Chair: — Committee members have had distributed to them a copy of the second report of the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Infrastructure. Is this report adopted by the committee?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — I'll need a member to move a report. Mr. Trew. This, being agreed, is passed.

That concludes the business before the committee. It now being 5 o'clock the committee stands adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 17:00.

